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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 004645

SIPDIS

STATE PLEASE PASS TO AIT/W, EAP/RSP/TC AND OES/IHA  
HHS PLEASE PASS TO ERIKA ELVANDER  
GENEVA PLEASE PASS HEALTH ATTACHE DAVID HOHMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMED](#) [AMGT](#) [CASC](#) [ECON](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [TBIO](#) [TW](#) [ESTH](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN: AVIAN FLU UPDATE

REF: A) SECSTATE 151549 B) TAIPEI 3598 C) TAIPEI  
3742 D) TAIPEI 3713 E) TAIPEI 4067 F) TAIPEI  
4264 G) TAIPEI 4128 H) TAIPEI 4160

1.(U) Summary. Taiwan has protested British claims that birds from Taiwan carried the H5N1 virus to the UK. Council of Agriculture (COA) authorities claim that Taiwan is currently free of H5N1 and that the Taiwan birds had undergone several checks and were certified healthy before they were shipped. Cross- Straits communication on AI has taken place on a number of occasions this year, primarily through Taiwan NGO's. Taiwan plans to beef up its liaison with health organizations in Hong Kong and Macau to be prepared for a possible AI outbreak. Taiwan authorities will hold talks with Roche concerning licensing of the Tamiflu vaccine and are confident they can produce generic version of the drug. End Summary

Taiwan Doubts UK's AI Report  
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12. Taiwan's Council of Agriculture (COA) has complained to British authorities about reports that 53 birds imported from Taiwan died in quarantine outside of London from the deadly H5N1 virus. The UK claims that a parrot imported from Suriname in late September, which tested H5N1 positive, had caught the deadly virus from silver-eared mesias birds imported from Taiwan while they were all held in quarantine together.

13. A shipment of 185 birds, including 100 mesias, supplied by a farm in central Taiwan left Taiwan by air Sept. 27 and arrived in Britain on Sept. 28. According to UK officials, 4 mesias died on arrival and 49 mesias died while in quarantine. In October, British authorities first alleged that a parrot imported from Suriname and held in quarantine near London had been found to have the H5N1 viral strain, and another bird held there, a Taiwan mesia, may have also caught it. However, On Nov. 16, the British concluded that it was the mesias imported from Taiwan that most likely was the source of the H5N1 virus.

14. COA officials told AIT that Taiwan authorities strongly objected to the report, saying that Taiwan is currently free of H5N1 and that the Taiwan birds had undergone several checks and were certified as healthy before they were loaded onto the plane. COA officials doubt the accuracy of the British report and have raised several questions. The British report stated that the 49 Taiwanese mesia birds died on Oct. 7, which is ten days after arrival. COA believes it unlikely that the infected birds could have survived until that day if the mesias had contracted the H5N1 virus before arriving in England. Aside from the 100 mesias, all the rest of the 85 birds from Taiwan tested H5N1 negative and were culled on Oct. 21. COA questions why birds from Suriname and Taiwan were kept in the same quarantine space and why tests were pooled. COA also questioned the discrepancy in the number of mesias. COA officials told AIT that Taiwan's records show the shipment contained exactly 100 mesia birds, however, the British report put the number at 101. The British reports also showed that no tests had been done on 34 birds from Suriname which arrived on Sept. 16, but which died before the Taiwan mesias died on Oct. 7. UK authorities only took samples of the two Suriname birds that were found dead on arrival. It is unclear how many mesias UK authorities examined had tested positive with H5N1. Taiwan officials stated that the British report is ambiguous and COA believes that the H5N1 virus existed in the quarantine facility before the Taiwan birds arrived.

15. Taiwan's Bureau of Animal Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine Bureau (BAPHIQ) told AIT that Taiwan is deeply concerned over this issue and has delivered protest messages to the British Trade Office in Taipei, but has not received a response. Taiwan will send veterinary epidemiologists to the UK soon to examine the situation. In addition, BAPHIQ plans to send a letter to both British officials and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) to express dissatisfaction with the way the incident was handled by British authorities.

Bird Flu Subvirus Found in Tainan, Not a Threat

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16. The Animal Quarantine Division of BAPHIQ confirmed on Nov. 17 that it detected H7N3 virus in bird droppings found in a wetland in Tainan on Nov 14. BAPHIQ announced to the public and confirmed to AIT that H7N3 is a low pathogenic AI virus and poses no threat to humans. BAPHIQ stated samples will be taken from every chicken farm within a 3 km radius of where the H7N3 virus was found in Tainan for the next three months. Taiwan's Animal Health Research Institute, a facility under COA, has conducted routine AI surveillance of migratory water fowl since August 1998. During that time, it has tested more than 20,000 samples and detected avian influenza virus strains in 270 of the samples (as of October 2005). None of the strains isolated were highly pathogenic or H5N1. The samples were collected from six different locations throughout Taiwan. The Institute also tests commercial poultry operations on a routine basis. As of Nov. 15 this year, 2,475 samples of AI virus of migratory birds have been taken, and samples have been collected from 524 chicken farms, 85 duck farms and 52 goose farms.

#### Cross-Strait AI Exchanges

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17. China's Taiwan Affairs Office announced on Nov. 16 that China's Cross Strait Agriculture Exchange Association has notified Taiwan of the PRC's AI status through Taiwan NGOs - the Red Cross and Medical Associations - fifteen times already this year. However, as China confirmed on Nov. 16 its first human cases of AI, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said that AI cases have been found in eleven of China's provinces, but China has only announced six cases. Taiwan plans to seek enhanced communications with health authorities in Hong Kong and Macau and with international health organizations to be better prepared in the event of further AI outbreaks in China.

#### Tamiflu Licensing

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18. Taiwan's Office of Intellectual Property is scheduled to hold talks with Roche Nov. 18 in Taipei on licensing Tamiflu for production by Taiwan firms. The National Health Research Institute reiterated its ability to produce a generic version of anti-viral Oseltamavir. CDC Director Steve Kuo, after returning from a WHO AI conference held in Geneva on Nov. 15, said that on the issue of Roche releasing the Tamiflu patent the WHO has been purposely ambiguous except to say on-going negotiations have been taking place and favorable progress has been made. Kuo said that some nations had expressed doubts over whether Taiwan could make a generic version of the drug, but he was confident that Taiwan could do so. Kuo also stated that WHO planned to hold regional AI drills around the world and that Taiwan hoped to participate.

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